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AN APPEAL

TO THE

LEGISLATURES OF THE UNITED STATES

IN RELATION TO

PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

BY CHARLES BROOKS,

MEDFORD, MASS.

SECOND EDITION.

CAMBRIDGE:

PRESS OF JOHN WILSON & SON.

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*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the
State of——.*

GENTLEMEN, — A self-appointed missionary, now a septuagenarian, who has labored gratuitously for free public schools since 1835, asks permission to address you as fellow-workers in the great national cause of *Education*. I hold your office in highest respect, and have the fullest confidence in your wisdom, justice, and patriotism, and would now give you in brief the results of my study and experience in this country and Europe, so far as relates to the action of State Legislatures.

CHARLES BROOKS,

JUNE 27, 1867.

Medford, Mass.

PRESENT DUTIES
OF
LEGISLATURES IN THE UNITED STATES
IN RELATION TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

CARLYLE says, "It is the clearest duty, prescribed by Nature herself, under silent but real and awful penalties, of governing persons in every society, to see that the people, so far as possible, are taught; that, wherever a citizen is born, some chance be offered him of becoming a man. This is for ever the duty of governors, and persons of authority in human societies."

The State Legislatures, in our American Union, have the sole power of creating public free schools within their limits. In those States where such a system of elementary education does not exist, it is the present duty, and will be the highest interest, of such States to create and foster such a system of pure, democratic, republican instruction.

What form should legislation take? Any State Legislature might pass such laws as these: Towns having fifty families shall provide one public free school, to be kept six months in each year; towns having one hundred families, one school for one year; one hundred and fifty families,

two schools of nine months each ; five hundred families, two schools for one year ; and so on. Larger numbers and longer times may be substituted for the above.

GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION. — The supervisory powers should be, —

1. *The local School Committee*, chosen by the town or city, and clothed with the largest powers that can be given to a town or city ; their salaries to be fixed and paid by the town or city.

2. *County Superintendents*, to be chosen by ballot in each county ; their salaries to be fixed by the Board of Education, and paid by the counties.

3. *Board of Education*, composed of the Governor and Lieutenant-Governor (*ex officiis*), three County Superintendents, and five other distinguished citizens, who shall be chosen by the Legislature. The Secretary of the Board shall be chosen by the Board, and be a member of it. The salaries shall be fixed by the Legislature, and paid by the State.

Duties of the above Officers. — The local School Committee shall organize and control the public schools of their city or town. They shall decide what text-books and apparatus shall be used in their schools, what time shall be devoted to certain studies, what rules and regulations shall be enforced, and whatever else may relate to the improvement and happiness of the pupils. They should elect the teachers after the most comprehensive and searching examination ; never forgetting, that AS IS THE TEACHER, SO IS THE SCHOOL.

It should be the duty of County Superintendents to deliver lectures on educational subjects in all the schools with which they are connected ; to assist in the semi-annual examinations ; to be the teachers in the Teachers' Institutes ; and to do all they can to elevate the standard of instruction and government.

It should be the duty of the Board of Education to watch over and direct the whole subject and interests of public free schools through the State. They should collect authentic information on educational topics from all quarters of the civilized world; and recommend such new legislation as the advances in science, literature, arts, government, and religion make necessary.

Every town and city in the State should report annually, in full, to the Board of Education, upon every thing relating to the condition, prospects, and needs of the public schools within its limits. Each County Superintendent should annually report to the same Board an account of his labors, and suggest such changes in the management or teaching of the public schools as he deems important.

The Board of Education should report annually to the Legislature a minute and comprehensive account of every thing important relating to the public schools of the State; which Report should be printed, and sent to every School Committee in the State.

The condition of our country now calls very emphatically upon every State Legislature in our Union to act on this subject as patriots and philanthropists. The aim should be to establish public free schools on every inhabited square mile where they do not now exist. To secure the utmost efficiency and success in schools thus established, it will be necessary to have competent and purposely prepared teachers: therefore it will be great economy, as well as wisdom, to establish Normal Schools, through whose agency the best modes of teaching and governing may become universal. The *Primary*, *Grammar*, and *High Schools* are found to be the necessary and successful grades; beginning with children at the age of five, and ending with those at the age of fifteen. This system of individual and national education is perfectly simple. It has been tried with success in differ-

ent countries. It is admirably suited to our present condition, and will be found equally useful to our future nameless millions of inhabitants. It will make the United States a united brotherhood of intelligent and happy citizens.

Each State Legislature in our republic has the sole right to introduce and support such a system for the benefit of all its citizens.

It has been asked, "What results do you expect from your system of public free schools?" We answer, — that children should be taught in school what they will most need in the world; and we think they will most need *to live religiously, to think comprehensively, to reckon mathematically, to converse eloquently, and to write grammatically*. If children properly learn and understand these five sources of happiness and prosperity, they will be able to make the most of themselves, and do the most good to others.

A Legislature establishing the true system of free public instruction may be sure of securing many thousand instances of such success. Education, especially moral education, underlies all the sources of human power, action, and hope. Religion, enthroned in the lives of its citizens, is the cheapest police that any country or government can maintain.

We accordingly ask each Legislature in our Union so to recognize the highest motive powers of the human mind in their public free schools, that the physical, intellectual, and moral powers of the rising generations may be developed in their natural order, proper time, and due proportion; each power occupying the exact place in the grown-up character which God ordained in the infant constitution. The most will be reached by aiming at the highest. As national character is manufactured, we should see that the elements which *should* compose that character are doing their proper work upon the formative periods of youthful development.

The peculiar condition of our country makes this the fortunate time to unite East and West, North and South, in one harmonious movement for the great interests of national education. On this subject there can be but one aim and one hope, — the aim and the hope of establishing such a system of democratic, republican education as the nineteenth century demands of the first republic in the world. We hope the time is not far distant, when a boy, at the age of five, can enter the free primary school of his native town, go through the grammar and high schools, then enter the free State college, and thence pass to the free national university, graduating there at the age of twenty-four, qualified for the proper discharge of all the duties of the profession or trade he has chosen. It will be found, that only a small number of all the pupils in a State will go through the whole course; but it should be made certain, that no pupil of distinguished ability should ever be denied the most copious supply of means through his entire academic life, although his parents may be the most indigent in the State. Such a national system, wisely and impartially administered, would be to our Union as a central heart, sending the nutritious currents of physical, intellectual, and moral life to every extremity of our vast republic. We have reason to know, that our illustrious American philanthropist, Mr. George Peabody, would welcome the inauguration of such a national system. Would it not be expedient for State Legislatures to co-operate in Mr. Peabody's efforts to establish free schools?

It is proposed, in these remarks, rather to make some friendly suggestions to State Legislatures, than to discuss the proposition of a national system; but we ought to say a few words about *compulsion*.

In the kingdom of Prussia, every child is compelled to attend some school, whether his parents will or not. The

Annual Report has these words: "There is not a single human being in Prussia who does not receive education, intellectual and moral, sufficient for all the needs of common life." This law of compulsion had been in operation but fourteen years when pauperism and crime had diminished thirty-eight per cent.

In the present relationships of our mixed population in the United States, this law of compulsion is called for as a defence of our liberties. We have in our country more than a million of children between the ages of five and sixteen who can neither read nor write! Do you ask, What are we going to do with them? That is not the question. The question is, What are *they* going to do with *us*? Think of their future power at the ballot-box! We can disarm their animal ferocity and traditional prejudices only by intellectual culture and moral principle; and this preventive process can be effectually applied, in nineteen cases out of twenty, *only* during the period of youth. Society has a right to defend itself against crime, against murder, arson, &c. Has it not an equal and prior right to defend itself against the *cause* of crime, which is ignorance? If you force a young man into prison because he is a thief, we call upon you to force him, while a boy, into a schoolhouse, to prevent his becoming a thief. Here surely "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

At this period, when four millions of freedmen are to carry their votes to the ballot-box to help shape the destinies of our republic, what language can overstate the pressing necessity of their being educated to comprehend their new position, exercise their new rights, and obey their new laws? It is the command of Nature's God, that all children should be educated in order to answer the purposes of their creation. If a parent be so weak or wicked as to refuse his child the daily bread of knowledge, let the Legislature stand

in the place of parent to that child, and do for him what his nature demands, and the public safety requires. To enforce the law, let the selectmen of a town be empowered to impose on that delinquent parent a fine not less than one dollar, and not more than five dollars. This fine would not need to be imposed in any neighborhood more than half a dozen times, because public sentiment would so heartily approve its benevolent aim, that it would silently change all objections, as it did in Prussia.

It is the opinion of many sound statesmen and enlightened Christians among us, that the time has come for each State Legislature in our Union to inaugurate and sustain within its borders a system of free public schools, open to all children without regard to locality, condition, sex, or race.

If it seems to you, gentlemen, that this is the true initial step in the great system of free, public instruction in the United States, may not the country confidently calculate on your early and generous co-operation in the noble enterprise?

Shakspeare says, —

“Doubt not but success
Will fashion the event in better shape
Than I can lay it down in likelihood.”

LETTER.

[With pleasure, I present the following letter of a distinguished friend of education, assured, that, whenever his *modus operandi* shall be skilfully tried, it will be crowned with success.]

WEST MEDFORD, May 17, 1867.

REV. CHARLES BROOKS.

MY DEAR SIR, — In compliance with your request, I will now give you my very crude notions on the best mode of promoting the spread of education in our Southern and Western States. I agree with you, that the first step is to persuade each State Legislature to establish free public schools wherever they are required. This will prove, as I think, not a very difficult matter, if the right mode of proceeding be adopted at the outset. In the first place, you must give the members of those Legislatures a correct idea of what a school should be; that is to say, what is now meant by education. They are to be made to understand that teaching is a *science*, and a very exact and delicate one; that a teacher is an *artist*, who must not only have a training to fit him for his calling, but a natural aptitude for it, and a degree of tact, as well as qualities of mind and temper, such as are not given to all. A teacher, in short, must, as you will show them, first be taught how to teach, just as we are all taught our particular trade or occupation before we undertake to practise it. I am supposing that you are to address gentlemen who are much in the state we were in some forty years ago, when yourself, and afterwards other enlightened men, opened our eyes to the true meaning of education. In our boyhood, any one who could read, write, and cipher was thought fitted to *keep school*, as it was then called; while the primary schools, for little children, were in the hands of superannuated females, who eked out a poor living by teaching them what they

knew themselves. *Now* a teacher is required, not only to be well acquainted with the branches he is called upon to teach, but to study the minds and tempers of his pupils, as well as any faults they may have arising from defects of previous training.

You say very justly in your letter, "As is the teacher, so is the scholar;" and this maxim applies not only to learning, properly so called, but to deportment. Manners are as important as knowledge, and the teacher should be a model to his pupils in this respect as well as all others. Now, in my view, the best and the only way to make men sensible of all this is to set it before their eyes; to show them by example what may be done, and what is, in fact, now doing elsewhere.

My plan, then, would be to propose, in the first place, to the Legislatures to permit a normal teacher to come before them, attended by two or three of his or her pupils. He should go provided with diagrams, maps, plans, and whatever apparatus he may require for a full illustration of his method. Of course, notice would be given of the intended lecture; and the public, as well as members of the Legislature, would be invited to attend. By this means, unless I am greatly mistaken, one hour would bring about a new revelation and an entire revolution in regard to education. Every parent, and especially every mother, who was present, would never rest till the blessing was secured to her children. More, I am persuaded, would be accomplished in this one sitting, than by volumes of explanation, or years of importunity, in any other way.

In saying this, I do not speak entirely without experience.

Something less than forty years ago, it became necessary to bring before our Legislature the subject of the *blind*, with a view to an appropriation for a State Institution for their education.

The subject was quite new; and very little impression was made, until notice was given, that Dr. Howe would, on a certain day, exhibit before the members of the Legislature his method of teaching the blind. Several children, totally blind, had previously been taught to read by means of raised letters.

The meeting was opened, and a little boy was called up, who read, feeling along the page, a passage the teacher had selected from one of the Gospels. This caused great excitement in the audience, and many were incredulous; one influential member of the Legislature declaring his belief, either that the child could see,

or that he had got that particular passage by heart. The gentleman was invited to come upon the platform. The green silk bandage, with which the boy's eyes were covered for looks merely, was removed, so that all could see that he was without visual organs. The gentleman was then requested to turn to any passage in the book he might select. He did so, and the boy began slowly to read it. He had not read three verses before the doubter stepped off the platform with tears in his eyes, calling out, "*Only tell me what you want. I am ready to vote whatever you say.*" In fact, six thousand dollars a year was voted unanimously a few days after. Unless I greatly mistake, something like this will result from the experiment I propose. All that need be required, I think, is that the expenses of the exhibition, and of the party going and returning, should be paid. The Trustees of Mr. Peabody's Fund could not do better than to appropriate what may be necessary for this purpose.

With many thanks, so far as I am individually concerned, for the great service you have already rendered this noble cause, and with warm wishes for your further success,

I am, dear sir, your devoted friend and kinsman,

EDWARD BROOKS.

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